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HOW MUCH WORK IS DONE IN AMERICAN LITERATURE IN THE HIGH SCHOOL, AND BY WHAT METHODS?

BECAUSE the priesthood of the college is openly criticised, but tacitly accepted, by the secondary school, one might be justified in the supposition that the high school has no authority of its own in the choice of studies or methods. Because it is easier to criticise than to create, it would seem that the high school has been pursuing the path of least resistance, and has expended its force in assaulting the entrance barriers erected by the college in self-defense. That the secondary school has not lost its primitive independence of thought and action is demonstrated by the English curriculum of the high schools of Iowa. Although English has received much wholesome discipline from the college, it still sturdily maintains a policy of self-government, with a system of protective tariff, varying with the grade of the school from which the diploma is issued, and a species of Monroe Doctrine which proclaims the right of the American pupil to be prepared, not for a visionary college, but for practical life.

English in the secondary school becomes a hydra-headed monster, branching off into grammar, word-analysis, a history of the language, composition, rhetoric, and American and English literature. The relative importance of these subjects, and the amount of time to be devoted to each, are worthy of careful consideration; but these vital questions do not come within the province of this committee. Its function is confined to the subject of literature, with special reference to the study of American literature. Its office is to determine how much work is done in American literature in the high schools of Iowa, and by what methods.

The college-entrance requirements in English stipulate the careful study of four books and the cursory reading of ten books in English literature. Out of the fourteen books assigned for

the year 1903, but one is of American authorship, and this one, *The Vision of Sir Launfal*, is English rather than American in narrative and atmosphere. Since the secondary school, either openly or covertly, accepts the entrance stipulations of the college, the natural inference is that the high-school graduate has little or no knowledge or appreciation of American literature. That this inference is incorrect has been proved by the reports received from one hundred and thirteen high schools in Iowa, all of which certify that American classics constitute no insignificant part of their curriculum. The fact that selections from American authors are read or studied incidentally in the grammar grades does not preclude the study of American literature in the high school.

There are advantages to be derived from an acquaintance with the classics of one's own country which cannot be gained from a study of the masterpieces of the world's literature. "If American youth are to live in and perpetuate a growing democracy, they must be educated in democratic ideals; they need to absorb the genius of American civic and literary life." American democracy finds its highest expression in the Bunker Hill orations of Webster, the Gettysburg oration of Lincoln, and the Harvard "Commemoration Ode" of Lowell. When pupils leave the high school their general reading is confined almost solely to American books by American authors. The cultivation of a taste for the best American books not only promotes individual development, but creates an atmosphere that broadens and uplifts community life.

Whatever enthusiasm for home and country arouses the American spirit, a catholicity of taste and sentiment demands that the claims of the great and glorious contributions of British authors shall not be ignored. So long as America has not produced a Macaulay or a Milton, a Burke or a Shakespeare, English classics should constitute a considerable part of the literature courses of study. For disciplinary power, for sublimity of thought, for insight into human nature—in brief, for a criticism of life, these authors have no peer in the literary history of America.

That American literature receives a large proportion of time in the one hundred and thirteen high schools—perhaps too large a proportion for its relative worth—is demonstrated by the statistics compiled by the committee. The average time spent on American literature, as compared with the average time devoted to English literature, estimating five recitations weekly, six months of American to eight months of British. Although this is the general average, the proportion of time in the individual schools is widely diverse. For example, a comparison of the reports received from three of the larger high schools of the state reveals the fact that one of these schools averages one year of American and three years of English literature; a second averages six months of American and two years and three months of English; and a third devotes one year to each.

The place in the course and the methods employed are as widely at variance as the time element; but a consideration of averages, rather than a discussion of individual schools, will probably be of greater value in determining results.

The high schools from which reports have been received are so diverse in enrolment and in teaching force that in order to reach something like an approximation of interests and of practical problems it has been deemed advisable to classify these reports. Although the question of time and of values of literary study varies with the individual school, it is safe to infer that the problems are more nearly identical in schools of similar numbers in enrolment and in teaching force. Acting on this hypothesis, the committee has divided the schools reporting into two classes: the first comprises those schools containing an enrolment of less than one hundred and fifty pupils, and the second, those with an enrolment of more than one hundred and fifty pupils.

Answers to the questions sent out by the committee have been received from ninety-three schools of the first class, and have been tabulated and averaged as follows:

TABLE I.

Number of high schools reporting with an enrolment of less than one hundred and fifty pupils	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	93
Number of hours devoted to the study of English literature	-	-							12,304
Number of hours devoted to the study of American literature	-	-							10,970

TABLE II.

	Yes	No
1. Is English literature studied before American? - - - -	23	70
2. Is American literature studied alone? - - - -	54	39
3. Is it studied in connection with composition or rhetoric? - -	41	52
4. Is the history of American literature studied? - - - -	71	22
5. In the first year of the course? - - - -	14	
6. In the second year of the course? - - - -	19	
7. In the third year of the course? - - - -	23	
8. In the fourth year of the course? - - - -	15	
9. Is American literature presented by subjects; <i>e. g.</i> , poetry, fiction, and essays? - - - -	33	60
10. Is it presented chronologically; <i>e. g.</i> , colonial, revolutionary, and national? - - - -	73	20
11. Is it presented to illustrate methods of composition; <i>e. g.</i> , description, narration, and exposition? - - - -	42	51
12. Is a text-book in American literature used? - - - -	75	18

An examination of this table warrants the conclusion that in the smaller high schools of the state the time devoted to American and to British literature is about equal; or, to be more specific, an average of six months of American to seven months of British. A marked preference is shown for the study of the history of American literature; but the year in the course in which it is introduced shows little evidence of uniformity; a small majority of the schools have placed it in the third, or Junior, year. Four schools employ a text-book to one that does not.

An examination of Tables III and IV shows that nearly twice as much time is devoted to English as compared with American literature in the larger high schools of the state, the proportion, counting five recitations weekly, being fourteen months of English to eight months of American. The history of American literature is studied in ten out of twenty high schools, but the study of classics in connection with rhetoric and composition is also carried on in these schools. The third and fourth years are given the preference in the study of the history of American literature. A text-book in American literature is used in thirteen out of twenty schools.

A comparison of these two tables justifies the conclusion that more time is devoted to British masterpieces in the larger than in the smaller high schools, that the history of American litera-

ture is given less attention in the larger high schools, and that the third year for this study predominates in both classes of high schools.

TABLE III.

Number of high schools reporting with an enrolment of more than one hundred and fifty pupils - - - - -	20
Number of hours devoted to the study of English literature - -	5,684
Number of hours devoted to the study of American literature - -	3,288

TABLE IV.

	Yes	No
1. Is English literature studied before American? - - - -	8	12
2. Is American literature studied alone? - - - -	9	11
3. Is it studied in connection with rhetoric or composition? - -	13	7
4. Is the history of American literature studied? - - - -	10	10
5. In the first year of the course? - - - - -	1	
6. In the second year of the course? - - - - -	1	
7. In the third year of the course? - - - - -	4	
8. In the fourth year of the course? - - - - -	3	
9. Is American literature presented by subjects; <i>e. g.</i> , poetry, fiction, and essays? - - - -	8	12
10. Is it presented chronologically; <i>e. g.</i> , colonial, revolutionary, and national? - - - -	10	10
11. Is it presented to illustrate methods of composition; <i>e. g.</i> , description, narration, and exposition? - - - -	11	9
12. Is a text-book in American literature used? - - - -	7	13

One of the obstacles in the way of securing definite statistics in respect to the amount of time devoted to the study of American literature is the varying methods employed in the presentation of this subject. Many high schools effectively combine the study of literature and composition; others present American literature as a separate branch of study, sometimes without, but more often with, a text-book. A number of schools employ the composition-literature method in addition to the historical method, so that the foregoing tables are hardly accurate or satisfactory in data as to time and methods. It would seem that there should be a method of presentation which is more effective than all others; that there should be a year in the course for the study of American literature which surpasses others in its value to the pupil; and that the number of hours devoted to the study of American, as compared with the number devoted to the study of British, classics should be in proportion to their relative worth to an American pupil.

When American literature is studied to represent literary forms, such as poetry, fiction, and essays, when it is studied to illustrate methods of composition, such as narration, description, and exposition, it becomes the auxiliary of composition and rhetoric, and results in a desirable correlation of these studies with literature; but such study is not, strictly speaking, a study of literature. More valuable in human experience than the correlation of study with study is the correlation of study with life; and the branch, of all branches, which should be correlated with life is the one which is an expression and a criticism of life. Professor Brander Matthews asserts that a magnifying of the importance of American literature promotes provincialism, and a servile admiration of British literature tends toward colonialism. May the time come when the high-school graduate shall have an enlarged conception of life through a study of the great masterpieces of the world's literature in translations, so that he will have assimilated something of the art of the French, the strength of the German, and the sublimity of the Hebrew! Nor is this a wholly visionary view, for, if the high-school course be extended and the college course abridged, as seems to be the trend of the educational thought of today, there will be some place in our high-school system for such a course of literature in English as is conducted by Professor Moulton in the University of Chicago.

But while present conditions exist the committee would present the following suggestions relative to the course in literature for high schools offering more than two years of English:

1. The study of American masterpieces to illustrate literary forms is not a substitute for the study of the growth and development of American literature. The use of the historical method supplements and aids the study of American history, and promotes a knowledge of the philosophy of American life. The history of American literature is proportionately as important as the history of English literature; hence, whenever time is given to the English, time in a similar ratio should be given to the American.

2. Whether the study of the history of American literature

should be placed in the course prior or subsequent to the study of the history of English literature is a debatable question, because the American thought and expression have been strongly influenced by the English; and because American literature is in a measure a continuation of English literature. The history of literature can be studied more intelligently in the later than the earlier years of the high-school course.

3. The committee would acknowledge the great service which has already been rendered the secondary school by the college in its entrance requirements, and would urge the adoption of a more specific and practical formula for the study of English—a formula which shall consider the relative time-values of the branches of English, their place in the curriculum, and the most effective methods of presentation. The reports from the secondary schools have been a great revelation to the committee. If the normal and secondary department in its meeting of last year had acted on the assumption that the time devoted to the study of American literature in the high schools of the state is proportionate to the time assigned it in the list of books for reading recommended by the college-entrance requirements, which is in the ratio of fourteen to one, it would have committed a grievous blunder; for the actual practice of the one hundred and thirteen schools reporting gives six months of American to eight months of English literature. The committee is of the opinion that the college-entrance requirements place too little stress on the value of the study of American authors, and that the majority of the high schools unduly emphasize its study. The two important factors in the making of a high-school course in English, the college-entrance requirements and the actual practice of the high schools, could be harmonized by the college-entrance committee giving more prominence to the study of American authors, and by the high schools assigning more relative time to the study of English authors. A committee representing both the high schools and the colleges of the state is now interested in bringing about such harmony. This committee has already contributed a valuable report in the round table of English, and has been continued still further to perfect the work

so auspiciously commenced. It is to be hoped that the second report from this committee, which will be given at the round table meeting of next year, will do much toward harmonizing the now widely divergent elements of college requirement and high-school practice in the study of American literature.

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